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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000406

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MNUC](#) [PARM](#) [PTER](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: CHIRAC UPDATES FRENCH NUCLEAR DEFENSE DOCTRINE TO  
DEAL WITH TERRORISM

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Karl Hofmann, Reason 1.4 B and D

11. (C) Summary and comment: In a January 19 speech before an audience of MPs and military personnel at the L'ile Longue submarine base in Brittany, French President Chirac expanded on France's nuclear defense doctrine, last enunciated in 2001, suggesting the possibility of a nuclear response to terrorist threats from "regional actors" (as opposed to fanatical terrorists). Chirac noted the rise in WMD threats by "certain states, which seek to acquire nuclear, biological or chemical weapons in violation of treaties," and indicated that France must be prepared to use its "strategic forces" tactically, in addition to conventional means, to target their command control centers. MFA, Defense Ministry and Elysee advisors have indicated that the speech does not represent a major change and is merely part of ongoing evolution in France's nuclear policy -- and not directed against Iran. Nonetheless, they have implied that they are not unhappy with the public perception that the speech might be directed at Iran. End comment and summary.

#### An Updated Nuclear Deterrence Policy

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12. (C) On January 19, in a speech before MPs and naval personnel at a submarine base, Chirac reiterated key elements of France's nuclear deterrence strategy, including support for international conventions, diplomacy and the prevention of conflict, and the rejection of a first-strike option in a conventional military situation. This was the first such speech since 2001. In both speeches, Chirac defended the continued existence and financial costs of France's nuclear deterrence, noting that the end of the Cold War had not resulted in an end of threats to peace; and that France must continue to be vigilant against threats to France, French interests, and to European security by regional powers possessing WMD. Again, in both speeches, Chirac reiterated that France would not initiate the use of nuclear weapons in a military conflict, but that it reserved the right to respond to threats by attacking an aggressor's "centers of political, military, and economic power."

13. (C) This year, for the first time, Chirac stated France's willingness to react to threats from states sponsoring terrorism. He related how certain "powers" are pursuing nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, and that ballistic missile tests with ever increasing reach are increasing in the world. Chirac recognized that nuclear weapons would not deter "fanatical terrorists," but could deter states prepared to use or support WMD. In support of this new deterrence policy, Chirac observed that the number of nuclear warheads in some of France's submarine missiles had been reduced, presumably to allow for a more targeted response. Finally, he reiterated that France's nuclear umbrella would be available to its European allies.

#### Reactions

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14. (C) Press reaction to the President's speech in France (in contrast to elsewhere) has been restrained, focusing more on the ongoing costs. Center-left daily Le Monde criticized Chirac for grandstanding to demonstrate his continuing political virility and for limiting the options of his successor. So far, the French press has not echoed criticism in the UK and German press that Chirac's public affirmation of the role of nuclear deterrence could have an adverse impact on discussions with Iran.

15. (C) According to Chirac's strategic affairs advisor Laurent Bili, and MOD and MFA experts, the speech was an effort to "update" and "fine tune" France's nuclear deterrence policy -- an ongoing process since the mid-1990's, and especially since the President's comments of 8 June in 2001. All emphasized that the speech had been planned well in advance and that its timing was purely coincidental, following a number of postponements. On the question of Iran, the MFA emphatically told us that Iran was not the intended audience, although Iran "was free" to interpret it as it wished. In response to our inquiry, the MFA said that Chirac's reference to the extension of France's nuclear umbrella to its European allies had not been discussed with in capitals or at the EU.

Comment

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16. (C) The timing of this speech may or may not have been purely fortuitous, as our GOF interlocutors claim, but the impact strikes us as welcome. Chirac, placing France 8closer to the U.S. position8 in some local commentary, has articulated a muscular doctrine of asymmetrical response to state-sponsored WMD terrorism, and further raised the psychological stakes in the current diplomatic confrontation with Iran. While the ritualistic offer of a French nuclear umbrella to Europe implicitly challenges us (consistent with Chirac's vision of multi-polarity and a separate European power center), this is not the core of Chirac,s message, nor what has attracted public attention. Instead, this speech burnishes France,s already bright counterterrorism credentials, which remain a strong point of U.S.-French relations.

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